



Greetings from Bishop Michael for Catholic Schools Week 2024

The Catholic vision of education is rooted in the person of Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee. He came to be known as the Christ or anointed one of God himself. At the heart of the life of Jesus and his message is the reality of love. Not a “fuzzy” type of love but rather something more akin to the love of a parent for a child. Such love creates a profound connection between persons. It is ever thoughtful and ever attentive to the needs of the other. It is intrinsically generous. It instinctively gives of itself for the good of the other person. It nurtures and enhances the lives of all involved and ultimately makes the world a better place.

In theory, at least, enrolling in a Catholic school is enrolling in a school of love. In practice, Catholic schools should be places where relationships are modelled on the selfless love portrayed in the life of Jesus. Where students and staff care for and look out for each other. Where students respect and value each other. Where parents, school management and the wider community give of themselves for the good of each member of the school community.

The theme of this year’s Catholic Schools Week 2024 – “Catholic Schools as Communities of Service” – brings to the fore the idea of the Catholic school as a place where love is practiced and learned. During the year gone by, I have had an opportunity to visit a number of Catholic schools at both primary and post primary level. Each time, I have been struck by the genuine atmosphere of love and care among the staff and students. On many occasions, my visits were associated with events where this love was focused on those who needed a helping hand within the school community – the opening of new facilities for children with additional needs or the launch of a breakfast club. I have witnessed whole school communities engaged in fundraising of charitable work for people less well off than themselves.

The shoe-box appeal at Christmas or a non-uniform day for the local branch of St Vincent de Paul or for their local centre accommodating those fleeing from war or poverty. In their own small way, such school communities, inspired by the life and message of Jesus, are striving to make themselves, their communities, and our world a better place.

I take this opportunity to thank our Boards of Management, Principals, Teachers, School Staff, Pupils, Parents, Parents Associations, Priests, the members of our Diocesan Education Secretariats - and all those who are involved in the noble vocation that is Catholic Education throughout our sister Dioceses.

Let me end with a quote from the famous American song writer Oscar Hammerstein “A bell's not a bell 'til you ring it - A song's not a song 'til you sing it - Love in your heart wasn't put there to stay - Love isn't love 'til you give it away!” My wish and my prayer is that our Catholic school communities would continue not only to teach but also to practice and model the art of giving love away. Amen.

✠ Michael Duignan

Bishop of Clonfert
Bishop of Galway and Kilmacduagh
Apostolic Administrator of Kilfenora

Catholic Schools Week runs from 21st January to 27th January 2024. Further information on Catholic Schools Week and resources for use in your school can be found at www.catholicschools.ie